Author’s response to reviews

Title: Teasing apart 'the tangled web' of influence of policy dialogues: Lessons from a case study of dialogues about healthcare reform options for Canada

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Author’s response to reviews:

1. Reviewer #2: Thanks for the opportunity to re-review this paper on policy dialogues, which is much improved from the first version. There is still considerable confusion for me on the methodology, which is now increased with the addition of the CFIR as recommended by my fellow reviewer. I think it's potentially a great addition, but this framework can't just be mentioned a couple of times: it really has to be explained, explored and exploited if you are going to mention it. Comments along these lines:

1 R. Thank you for this comment and believe the paper is greatly strengthened as a result. We agree and have reworked many elements of the paper to explain how we have more thoroughly integrated the CFIR framework. This begins in the introduction where we position how the CFIR framework has the potential to help meet the objective of understanding the influence of policy dialogues on subsequent policy making. (Lines 171 to 182) page 5.

The implementation science literature similarly describes the implementation of research into practice as a “complex and messy task” [22] that depends on many factors including evidence, context, and factors that facilitate the change process [23]. While a recent systematic review identified 61 theories and frameworks (models) to enhance the spread of evidence-based interventions, only two models focused on implementation and policy level considerations [24]. The proponents of one of these models [10] points to the importance of better understanding how
ideas are diffused across policy-making. The other model, the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) [25] offers a consolidation of key constructs from published implementation theories as a “pragmatic structure for approaching complex, interacting, multi-level and transient states of constructs” [26]. It can be combined with the 3-I and policy cycle frameworks to better understand how policy dialogues can influence evidence use in policy-making.

In the methods section we are more explicit about the use of three conceptual frameworks (Boyko, 3-I and CFIR) to guide the research (lines 250 to 258 page 8):

Three conceptual frameworks were used as guides to the research. As discussed above, the Boyko model [8] relates features of policy dialogues (setting, mix of participants, use of evidence) to capacities of individuals, organizations, and systems to engage in evidence-informed policy-making at each level over the short-, medium- and long-term respectively. The 3-I framework describes factors that influence policy development across the various stages of the policy cycle. The CFIR model describes characteristics of the intervention and implementation processes, and contextual factors at multiple levels (individual, organizational, external policy and systems) that influence implementation of evidence-based options.

And we explain more clearly how we coded the data using the 3 frameworks (lines 320 to 358, pages 9 and 10):

The thematic coding of the interview, focus group and video data proceeded through two stages. Research team members initially reviewed all the data to obtain an overall impression of the findings. A subset of transcripts was then thoroughly reviewed by two researchers to reveal common themes. There was a very high level of agreement across coders (85%) based on an initial sample of 10 percent of coded content. The resulting codebook was used to analyze the remaining transcripts. We focus in this paper on comments about the influence of the dialogue on capacities, actions taken and influence on subsequent policy-making rather than on participants’ views of the policy options themselves. We included any sub-themes within the Boyko model (e.g. enhanced mutual understanding as an individual capacity) that were mentioned by a
minimum of two informants. During this stage of coding we identified emergent themes that pertained to how those capacities were shaped by the dialogue and any subsequent influence on policy-making (e.g. seeding new ideas) within the 3-I framework during the agenda-setting and formulation stages of the policy-cycle as discussed in the Boyko model. In the second stage, team members recoded the data using the categories of the CFIR model to reflect informant statements about contextual factors that could shape implementation of the options discussed at the dialogues [26].

In the findings section we have also been much more explicit with respect to elements of the CFIR framework. Illustrative quotes that relate to the key themes of the framework are provided in Table 5 and we have a significant section of the findings (lines 752 – 865, pages 15-18) devoted to this.

We have also reworked the figures to explicitly integrate CFIR into our conceptual model & pathways and added a thematic synthesis section lines 867 to 950, pages 18 – 22 to describe how we integrated the analysis of the three frameworks together to develop potential pathways of influence on different stages of the policy cycle.

2. It's unclear how you used the Boyko framework for the interviews and focus group, and for the analysis. You note up front that this is the case, but in the results, you say that the data were "initially reviewed by two researchers to reveal common themes." Then there are two overarching themes and then some sub-themes. You need to tell us what you asked participants - give us a sense of the interview approach - and how you got from there to the themes...how you did your analysis. It did

2 R. We have attempted to clarify this section. We removed the statement about two overarching themes which seemed to give more weight than necessary to the fact that some comments were about the specific policy options (not relevant to this paper) and other comments were about influence of dialogues on policy making (relevant to this paper). Lines 325 to 350, pages 8 and 9 more simply state:
We focus in this paper on comments about the influence of the dialogue on capacities, actions taken and influence on subsequent policy-making rather than on participants’ views of the policy options themselves.

We also have clarified the use of all three conceptual frameworks from the last version in the methods section as stated in response to the first question (lines 320 to 358, pages 9 and 10):

The thematic coding of the interview, focus group and video data proceeded through two stages. Research team members initially reviewed all the data to obtain an overall impression of the findings. A subset of transcripts was then thoroughly reviewed by two researchers to reveal common themes. There was a very high level of agreement across coders (85%) based on an initial sample of 10 percent of coded content. The resulting codebook was used to analyze the remaining transcripts. We focus in this paper on comments about the influence of the dialogue on capacities, actions taken and influence on subsequent policy-making rather than on participants’ views of the policy options themselves. We included any sub-themes within the Boyko model (e.g. enhanced mutual understanding as an individual capacity) that were mentioned by a minimum of two informants. During this stage of coding we identified emergent themes that pertained to how those capacities were shaped by the dialogue and any subsequent influence on policy-making (e.g. seeding new ideas) within the 3-I framework during the agenda-setting and formulation stages of the policy-cycle as discussed in the Boyko model. In the second stage, team members recoded the data using the categories of the CFIR model to reflect informant statements about contextual factors that could shape implementation of the options discussed at the dialogues [26].

3. Similarly with the CFIR framework...what is it, why did you use it and how. If you are adding this, you need to do much more work on it.

3R. Thank you for this comment. We have added a rationale on why the CFIR framework was chosen as discussed in response to the first comment above. (Lines 171 to 182) page 5 as well as how we used it (lines 250 to 258 page 8) and we have done much more work on it as describe above. the findings (lines 752 – 865, pages 15-18) and lines 867 to 950, pages 18 – 22
4. I'm still unclear about the various frameworks but I think this is just semantics. You started with Boyko and then suggested modifications to it, am I right? Or did you develop one, which is sometimes the language you use? Is Figure 2 the original Boyko or the modification?

4R. As discussed above, we have been more explicit in how the frameworks were used.

We have also developed new figures. One is a new version of the conceptual framework (Figure 2), which begins comments from informant themes that are consistent with the Boyko framework on the left hand side and adds in informants’ themes consistent with the 3I framework and themes consistent with the CFIR framework. A second set of Figures 3a to 3c, elaborate potential pathways of influence of dialogues on policy processes at the agenda-setting, formulation and implementation stages of the policy cycle.

5. Other general comments:
Where does the video footage come in? On page 11 you seem to indicate that these data are reported elsewhere...was this study part of a larger study? That needs to be clear.

5R. The video footage was analyzed in the same manner as the interview transcripts. We made transcripts of the video content and coded it in the same way as the interviews.

We now state this more explicitly on lines 320 and 321 page 9:

The thematic coding of the interview, focus group and video data proceeded through two stages. Research team members initially reviewed all the data to obtain an overall impression of the findings.

Note that the data that are reported elsewhere are participants’ opinions about the individual policy options that were presented at the dialogues. Due to length restrictions we do not report these in great detail here as they are less relevant to the objective of the case study. We have prepared a report that includes this information for the organization that sponsored the dialogues.
6. On page two the comment about "policy-maker's beliefs, values and, political goals and strategies" perpetuates the (mostly) myth that policy makers act on their own (individual) beliefs and values and ideas. I suggest keeping to needs and goals (and policy maker here is single...it should be collective, with the apostrophe after the s). A reference after this sentence would be ideal.

6R. Thanks for this comment. We did not intend to support such a myth. We are referencing the fact that evidence is only one input to policy making which also rightly depends on values of stakeholders (not just policy makers) and citizens.

On page 4, lines 93 – 96, we now state and include two references:

By promoting interactions between researchers and policy-makers (elected or appointed official who set the agenda, propose, develop and evaluate policies), policy dialogues can help in identifying and interpreting available evidence, and finding areas of accord between research evidence and policy-makers’ beliefs, values, political goals and strategies [4, 10].

7. Page 4: reasoned argument rather than debate...interested in the difference!

7R. Thanks for this comment. We have removed “rather than debate” and expanded this sentence to explain what we mean by reasoned argument page 4, lines 99 to 102:

Deliberative approaches foster structured conversations that value listening as much as speaking, informed and reasoned argument to develop collaborative understanding of the values that may underlie opposing views, and weigh reasons for and against different policy options with the aim of building toward common action[11]

8. Bottom of page 6: "We analyzed the findings of follow -up key informant interviews with delegates that..." - you did more than that. You actually did a case study. Or are you suggesting that the case study was a broader research study and this was a sub-study?
8R. Thank you for this comment. You are correct it is a case study and we have been more mindful of our language.

Lines 184 to 186, page 6: The language has been changed to:

This study used data from follow-up key informant interviews with delegates who attended four policy dialogue events hosted in 2011 by the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement (CFHI), as well as video commentary captured at the events.

And in methods, lines 207 to 213, page 7:

We conducted a case study [28] to explore the role of policy dialogues in knowledge uptake and use by policy decision-makers and stakeholders based on the perspectives of participants at such events. The case study approach is particularly well suited to investigating “a contemporary phenomenon within it’s real-life context” [28] and can help to draw lessons to improve practices in other cases [29]. It typically involves the use of a priori theory or a conceptual framework to improve rigour in data-gathering and analysis [30, 31] and allows theory to evolve based on emerging findings [31].

9. Bottom of page ten...you mention asking participants about any influence on policy making or further research activities. The latter hasn't been mentioned to now....and the focus has seemed to be about policy making. Why did you ask about research activities and how is that relevant?

9R. We agree that this is confusing. We have removed the reference to research activities and kept the focus on policy processes, which are the main focus of the paper. Lines 314 to 317, page 9:

Semi-structured and focus group interview guides asked informants to reflect on their experiences at the dialogues, the helpfulness of attending the dialogue, and any influence of the dialogues on subsequent policy processes.
10. Still some grammatical changes needed...it's instead of its, commas where none indicated

10R. Thanks for this comment, we have reviewed again for grammatical changes

11. Definition of policy maker would be helpful
In sum, this version of the paper is much stronger than the last, with some good additional definitions and explanations of how policy is developed, and good guidance for policy dialogues. There just needs to be a tightening of the methodology so we understand better how you got what you did.

11R. Thank you. We have included a definition of policy maker where first mentioned. Lines 92-96, page 4.

By promoting interactions between researchers and policy-makers (elected or appointed official who set the agenda, propose, develop and evaluate policies), policy dialogues can help in identifying and interpreting available evidence, and finding areas of accord between research evidence and policy-makers’ beliefs, values, political goals and strategies [4, 10].